

Tarver Over A Case Of Hollywooditis

Written by Rick Folstad
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TAMPA - It's like throwing up on your date at the senior prom. It's an ugly memory that isn't going to disappear with a good night's sleep.

Same with some losses. The hurt lingers, festers, doubles you up when you think back on it and realize what you could have done to change things, give it a happy ending.

At least that's the way Tampa's Antonio Tarver seems to be looking at it. His one-sided decision loss to Bernard Hopkins almost two years ago is still a tender spot on his psyche. The loss seems to come up every time he holds a press conference.

But he's got an explanation for the bad night. If you want to call it an excuse, it's a good one. Though Tarver doesn't give it a name, he lost to Hopkins because he had a rare condition we'll call Hollywooditis.

He went to Hollywood to be in a movie with Sly Stallone, and when he came back home, he brought "50 extra pounds" with him. Even worse, he left his focus back in California. And then he decided to take a fight with Hopkins.

The only known cure for Hollywooditis is a dose of reality. Hopkins provided the medicine.

"He didn't go to camp (for the Hopkins fight), he went to weight-watchers camp," said promoter Gary Shaw at a press conference at the West Tampa Boxing Club. "It was the wrong fight at the wrong time."

Tarver put it in fight terms.

"I left my fight in the gym."

That explains why he couldn't find it the night of the Hopkins fight.

He does seem to have gotten some of it back, winning two fights since the loss.

When Tarver (26-4, 19 KOs) faces IBF light-heavyweight champion Clinton Woods (41-3-1, 25 KOs) on Saturday night at the St. Pete Times Forum (SHOWTIME), he expects to have all of his "fight" back. And he'll need all of it.

The fight is half of a double-header featuring four of the top light-heavyweights in the world. In the other title fight, WBC champion Chad Dawson (25-0, 17 KOs) faces former world champ Glen Johnson (47-11-2, 37 KOs) in a promotion called TNT, or Title Night in Tampa.

For Tarver, the fight with Woods is a chance to show the home crowd he still has a lot of fight left in him.

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"I want to put to bed any notion that I'm over-the-hill," said Tarver, 39. "The critics don't have a clue. For them to write me off after one loss is ridiculous."

Tarver says the key for him is to stay close to his fighting weight and maybe avoid making movies while he's still a top contender.

"I learned from the (Hopkins) fight," he said. "I've just had one of my best camps and I am already on weight. I'm excited. I don't remember the last time I was breathing hard in the gym. If I had a blueprint, I'd want every camp to be like this one."

According to Tarver, another key to the fight is pressure. He hopes Woods brings it.

"If he fights like he always does and pressures me, the fight is going to end early," Tarver said. "When I have to chase down guys and corner them, that's when I have trouble. I don't think I will have to go looking for Woods. I'm going to break him down and knock him out."

A Tarver win won't erase the loss to Hopkins, but it might help him sleep better.